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**Tanzawa**

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(54) **THREE-DIMENSIONAL DEVICES HAVING  
REDUCED CONTACT LENGTH**

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See application file for complete search history.

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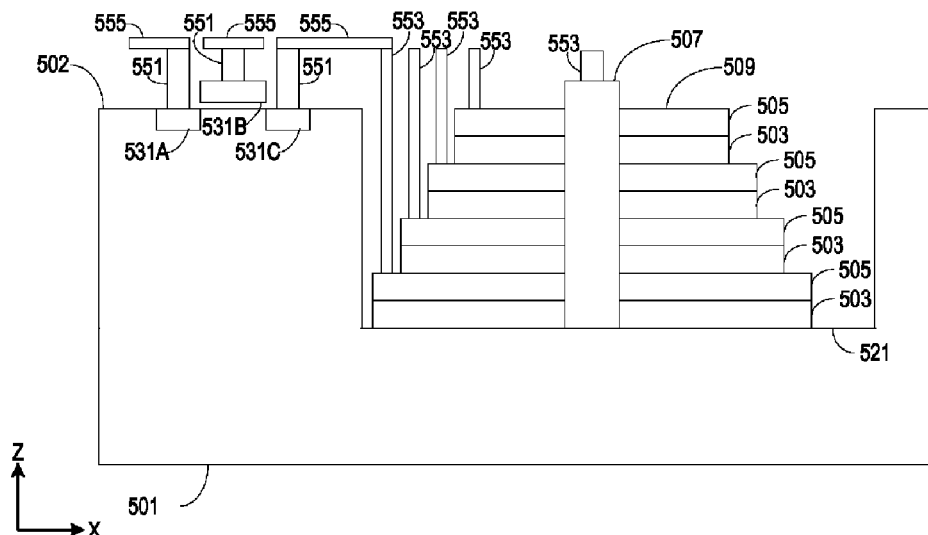
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Various embodiments comprise apparatuses and methods  
including a memory array having alternating levels of semi-  
conductor materials and dielectric material with strings of  
memory cells formed on the alternating levels. One such  
apparatus includes a memory array formed starting adjacent  
to a surface of a substrate. Peripheral circuitry is formed on an  
elevated portion that is adjacent to the memory array and has  
an uppermost portion substantially coplanar with an upper-  
most surface of the memory array. Additional apparatuses and  
methods are described.

**20 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets**





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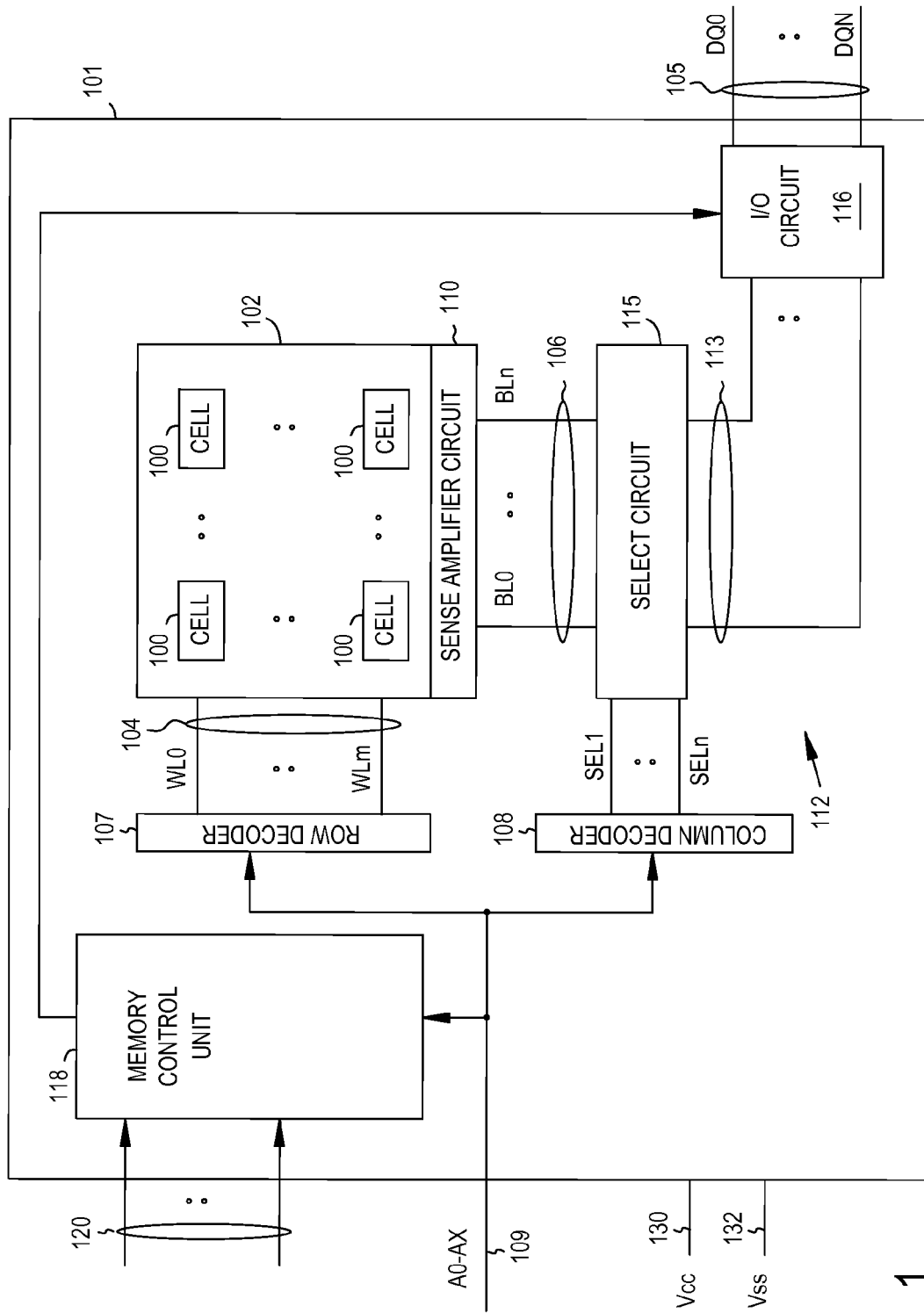


FIG. 1



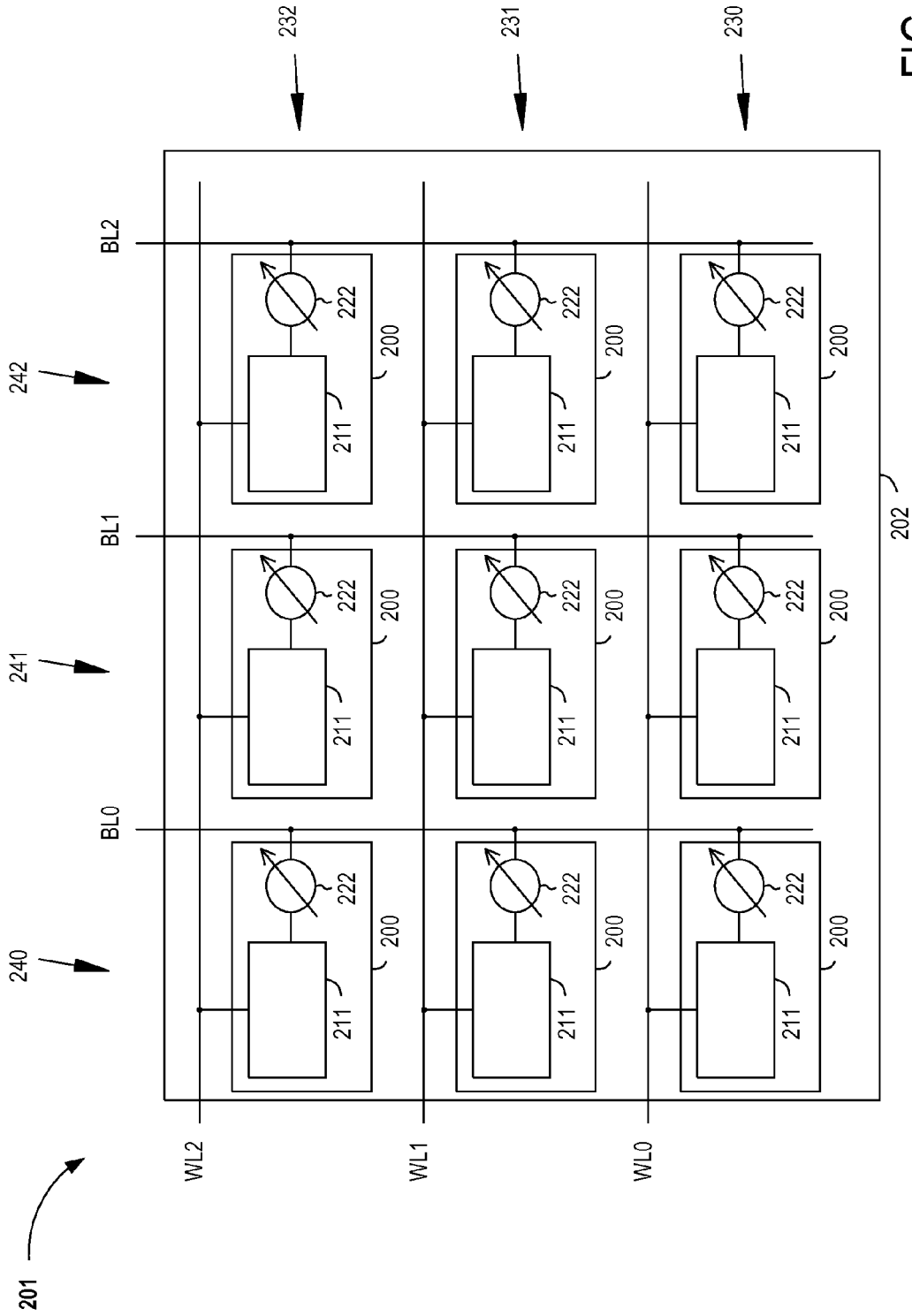


FIG. 2



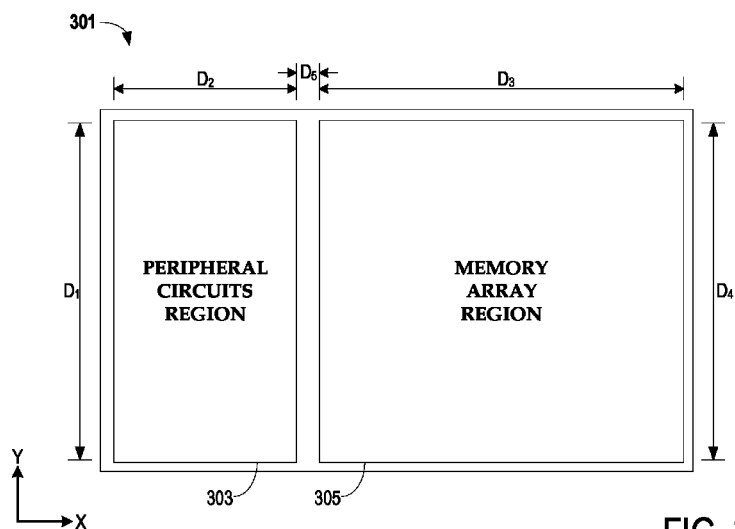


FIG. 3

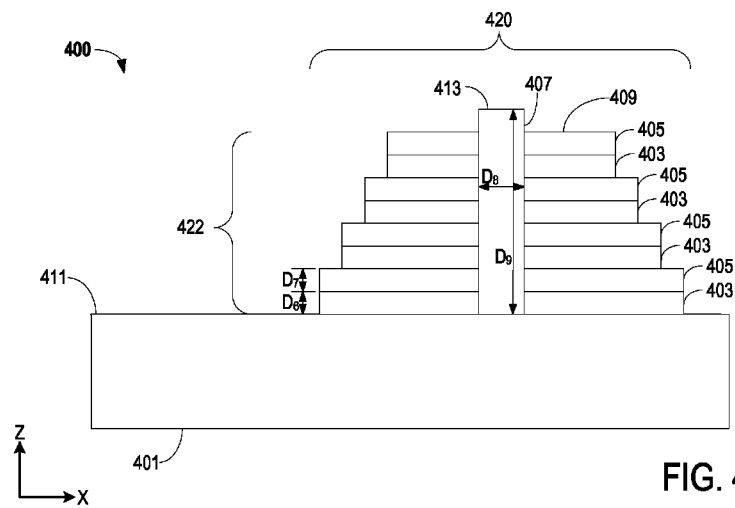
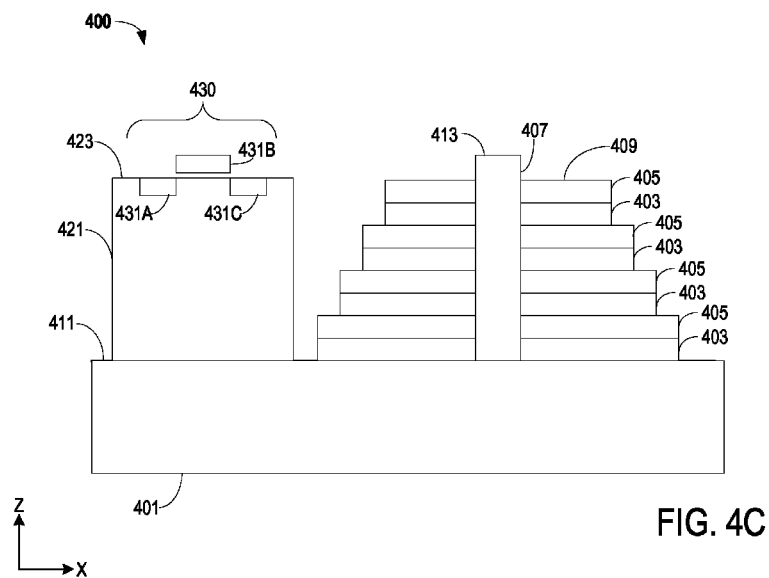
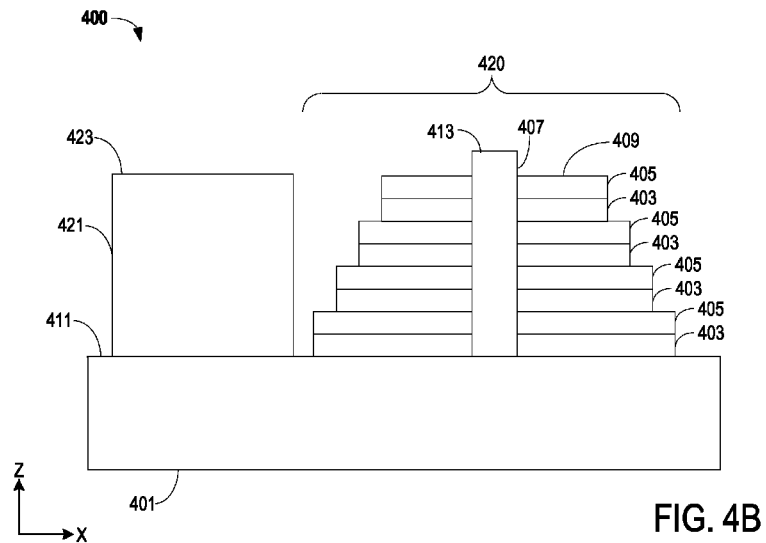
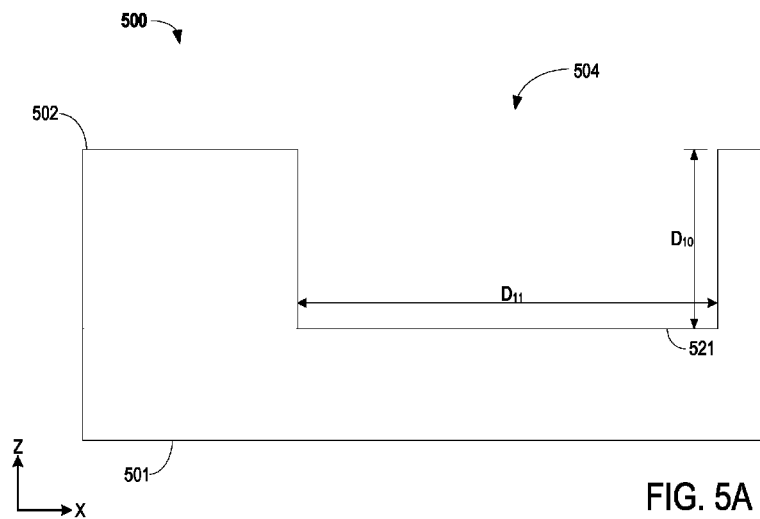
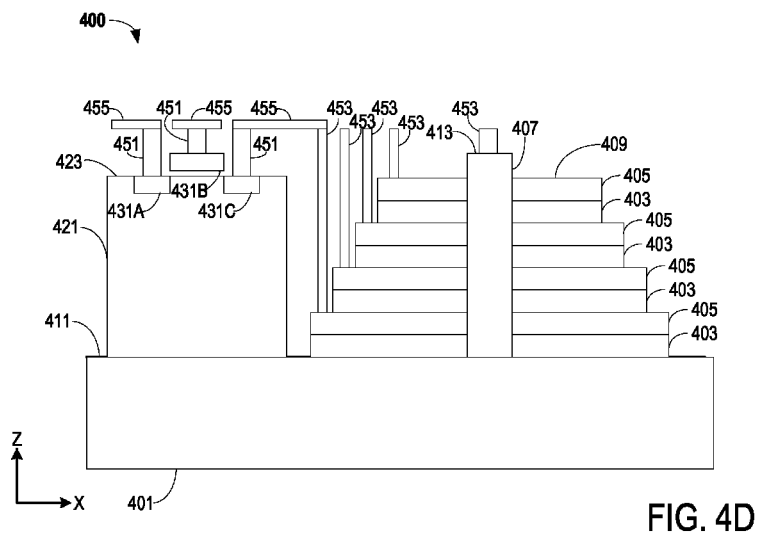


FIG. 4A

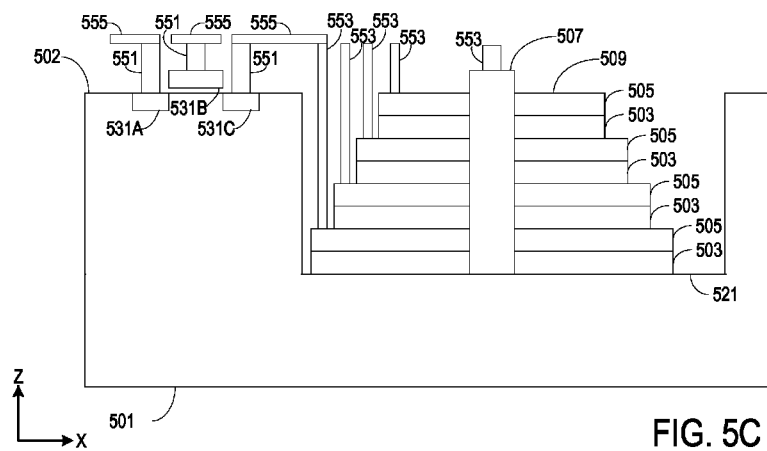
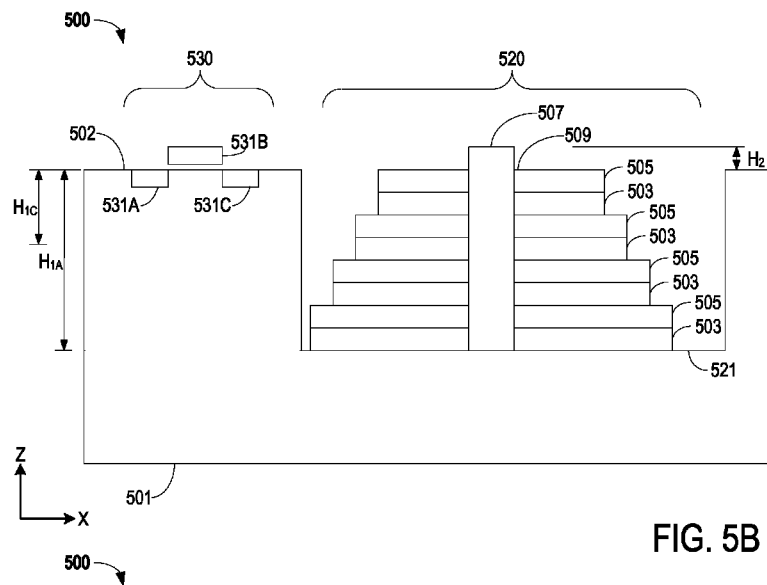














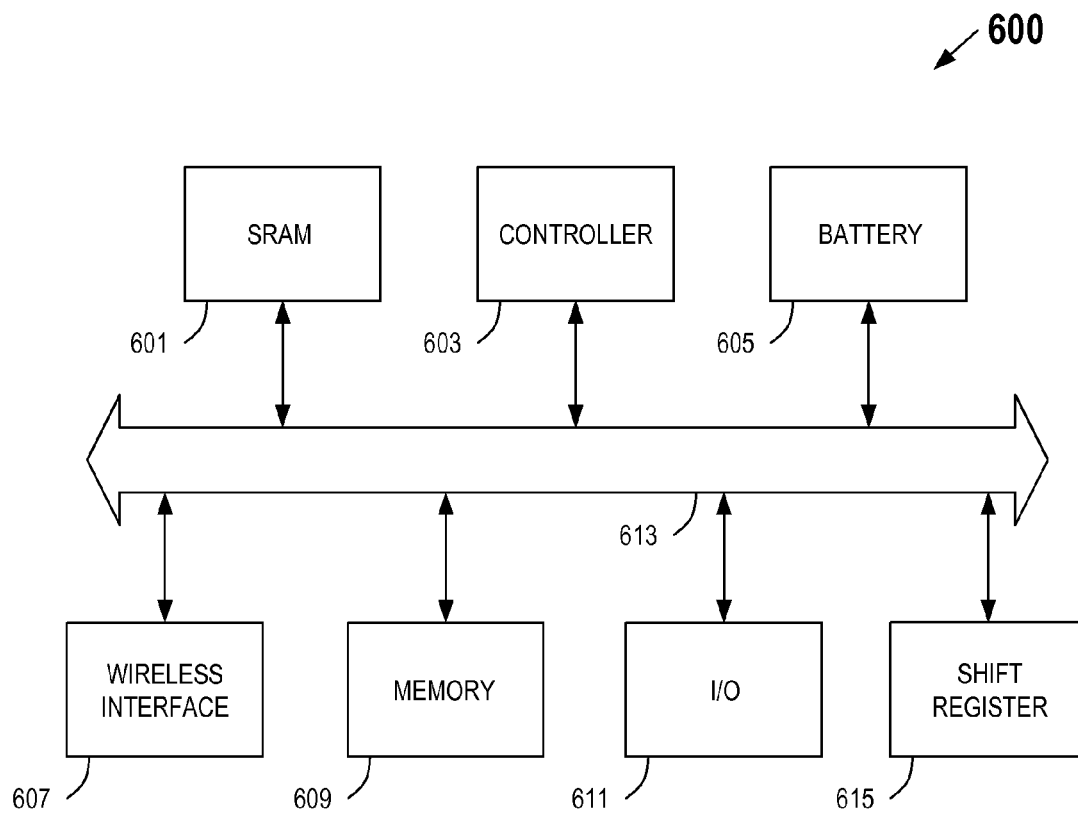


FIG. 6



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# THREE-DIMENSIONAL DEVICES HAVING REDUCED CONTACT LENGTH

## PRIORITY APPLICATION

This application is a divisional of U.S. application Ser. No. 13/599,900, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,952,482, filed Aug. 30, 2012, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

## BACKGROUND

Computers and other electronic systems, for example, digital televisions, digital cameras, and cellular phones, often have one or more memory and other devices to store information. Increasingly, memory and other devices are being reduced in size to achieve a higher density of storage capacity and/or a higher density of functionality.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows a block diagram of a memory device having a memory array with memory cells, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 2 shows a partial block diagram of a memory device having a memory array including memory cells with access components and memory elements, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 3 shows a plan view of a block diagram of a memory device, according to various embodiments;

FIG. 4A through FIG. 4D show elevational views during various operations performed in the formation of a memory device, according to an embodiment;

FIG. 5A through FIG. 5C show elevational views during various operations performed in the formation of a memory device, according to an embodiment; and

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a system embodiment, including a memory device according to various embodiments described herein.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The description that follows includes illustrative apparatuses (circuitry, devices, structures, systems, and the like) and methods (e.g., processes, protocols, sequences, techniques, and technologies) that embody the subject matter. In the following description, for purposes of explanation, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide an understanding of various embodiments of the subject matter. After reading this disclosure, it will be evident to person of ordinary skill in the art however, that various embodiments of the subject matter may be practiced without these specific details. Further, well-known apparatuses and methods have not been shown in detail so as not to obscure the description of various embodiments. Additionally, although the various embodiments focus on implementation within a memory device, the techniques and methods presented herein are readily applicable to a number of other three-dimensional (3D) electronic devices.

Generally, a 3D electronic device may be considered to be a device formed by a process that combines multiple levels of electronic devices (e.g., one device formed over another) using planar formations (e.g., multiple devices on a single level). Since multiple levels in 3D devices may use approximately the same area on a substrate, an overall density of devices (e.g., memory devices) can be increased in relation to the number of levels. However, simple combinations of, for

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example, 3D memory cells with peripheral transistors (e.g., formed as CMOS devices) may result in performance degradation due to higher resistance and parasitic values (e.g., higher capacitance) due to the increased heights of contact formations. The increased height of contacts may also lower device yield due to higher failure rates in contact formation. For example, transistors used in multi-level peripheral (e.g., support) circuits tend to have degraded performance characteristics when compared with similar transistors formed by existing planar technologies.

The disclosed subject matter proposes, among other things, various memory device structures that reduce the difference in height from the substrate between 3D memory arrays and peripheral circuits. Moreover, the disclosed subject matter is scalable with an increasing number of levels in 3D stacks. For example, the contacts and interconnections have substantially constant parasitic resistance and capacitance values regardless of the number of levels. Accordingly, transistor and wire performance may remain relatively constant regardless of the number of levels.

The disclosed methods and apparatuses can advantageously be used to, for example, increase cell density while maintaining a relatively small footprint. Further, the methods and apparatuses can be extended to NOR devices, microcontroller devices, other memory types, general purpose logic, and a host of other apparatuses. Various 3D devices including repeating devices (e.g., SRAM), transistors, standard CMOS logic, and so on may all benefit from application of the 3D fabrication processes disclosed herein.

Referring now to FIG. 1, a block diagram of an apparatus in the form of a memory device 101 is shown. The memory device 101 includes one or more memory arrays 102 having a number (e.g., one or more) of memory cells 100 according to an embodiment. The memory cells 100 can be arranged in rows and columns along with access lines 104 (e.g., wordlines to conduct signals WL0 through WLn) and first data lines 106 (e.g., bit lines to conduct signals BL0 through BLn). The memory device 101 can use the access lines 104 and the first data lines 106 to transfer information to and from the memory cells 100. A row decoder 107 and a column decoder 108 decode address signals A0 through AX on address lines 109 to determine which ones of the memory cells 100 are to be accessed.

Sense circuitry, such as a sense amplifier circuit 110, operates to determine the values of information read from the memory cells 100 in the form of signals on the first data lines 106. The sense amplifier circuit 110 can also use the signals on the first data lines 106 to determine the values of information to be written to the memory cells 100.

The memory device 101 is further shown to include circuitry 112 to transfer values of information between the memory array 102 and input/output (I/O) lines 105. Signals DQ0 through DQN on the I/O lines 105 can represent values of information read from or to be written into the memory cells 100. The I/O lines 105 can include nodes of the memory device 101 (e.g., pins, solder balls, or other interconnect technologies such as controlled collapse chip connection (C4), or flip chip attach (FCA)) on a package where the memory device 101 resides. Other devices external to the memory device 101 (e.g., a memory controller or a processor, not shown in FIG. 1) can communicate with the memory device 101 through the I/O lines 105, the address lines 109, or the control lines 120.

The memory device 101 can perform memory operations, such as a read operation, to read values of information from selected ones of the memory cells 100 and a programming operation (also referred to as a write operation) to program



(e.g., to write) information into selected ones of the memory cells **100**. The memory device **101** can also perform a memory erase operation to clear information from some or all of the memory cells **100**.

A memory control unit **118** controls memory operations using signals on the control lines **120**. Examples of the signals on the control lines **120** can include one or more clock signals and other signals to indicate which operation (e.g., a programming operation or read operation) the memory device **101** can or should perform. Other devices external to the memory device **101** (e.g., a processor or a memory controller) can control the values of the control signals on the control lines **120**. Specific combinations of values of the signals on the control lines **120** can produce a command (e.g., a programming, read, or erase command) that can cause the memory device **101** to perform a corresponding memory operation (e.g., a program, read, or erase operation).

Although various embodiments discussed herein use examples relating to a single-bit memory storage concept for ease in understanding, the inventive subject matter can be applied to numerous multiple-bit schemes as well. For example, each of the memory cells **100** can be programmed to a different one of at least two data states to represent, for example, a value of a fractional bit, the value of a single bit or the value of multiple bits such as two, three, four, or a higher number of bits.

For example, each of the memory cells **100** can be programmed to one of two data states to represent a binary value of "0" or "1" in a single bit. Such a cell is sometimes called a single-level cell (SLC).

In another example, each of the memory cells **100** can be programmed to one of more than two data states to represent a value of, for example, multiple bits, such as one of four possible values "00," "01," "10," and "11" for two bits, one of eight possible values "000," "001," "010," "011," "100," "101," "110," and "111" for three bits, or one of another set of values for larger numbers of multiple bits. A cell that can be programmed to one of more than two data states is sometimes referred to as a multi-level cell (MLC). Various operations on these types of cells are discussed in more detail, below.

The memory device **101** can receive a supply voltage, including supply voltage signals  $V_{cc}$  and  $V_{ss}$ , on a first supply line **130** and a second supply line **132**, respectively. Supply voltage signal  $V_{ss}$  can, for example, be at a ground potential (e.g., having a value of approximately zero volts). Supply voltage signal  $V_{cc}$  can include an external voltage supplied to the memory device **101** from an external power source such as a battery or alternating-current to direct-current (AC-DC) converter circuitry (not shown in FIG. 1).

The circuitry **112** of the memory device **101** is further shown to include a select circuit **115** and an input/output (I/O) circuit **116**. The select circuit **115** can respond to signals SEL1 through SELn to select signals on the first data lines **106** and the second data lines **113** that can represent the values of information to be read from or to be programmed into the memory cells **100**. The column decoder **108** can selectively activate the SEL1 through SELn signals based on the A0 through AX address signals present on the address lines **109**. The select circuit **115** can select the signals on the first data lines **106** and the second data lines **113** to provide communication between the memory array **102** and the I/O circuit **116** during read and programming operations.

The memory device **101** may comprise a non-volatile memory device, and the memory cells **100** can include non-volatile memory cells, such that the memory cells **100** can retain information stored therein when power (e.g.,  $V_{cc}$ , or  $V_{ss}$ , or both) is disconnected from the memory device **101**.

Each of the memory cells **100** can include a memory element having material, at least a portion of which can be programmed to a desired data state (e.g., by being programmed to a corresponding resistance or charge storage state). Different data states can thus represent different values of information programmed into each of the memory cells **100**.

The memory device **101** can perform a programming operation when it receives (e.g., from an external processor or a memory controller) a programming command and a value of information to be programmed into one or more selected ones of the memory cells **100**. Based on the value of the information, the memory device **101** can program the selected memory cells to appropriate data states to represent the values of the information to be stored therein.

One of ordinary skill in the art may recognize that the memory device **101** may include other components, at least some of which are discussed herein. However, several of these components are not shown in the figure, so as not to obscure details of the various embodiments described. The memory device **101** may include devices and memory cells, and operate using memory operations (e.g., programming and erase operations) similar to or identical to those described below with reference to various other figures and embodiments discussed herein.

With reference now to FIG. 2, a partial block diagram of an apparatus in the form of a memory device **201** is shown to include a memory array **202**, including memory cells **200** with access components **211** and memory elements **222**, according to an example embodiment. The memory array **202** may be similar to or identical to the memory array **102** of FIG. 1. As further shown in FIG. 2, the memory cells **200** are shown to be arranged in a number of rows **230**, **231**, **232**, along with access lines, for example word lines, to conduct signals to the cells **200**, such as signals WL0, WL1, and WL2. The memory cells are also shown to be arranged in a number of columns **240**, **241**, **242** along with data lines, for example bit lines, to conduct signals to the cells **200**, such as signals BL0, BL1, and BL2. The access components **211** can turn on (e.g., by using appropriate values of signals WL0, WL1, and WL2) to allow access to the memory elements **222**, such as to operate the memory elements **222** as pass elements, or to read information from or program (e.g., write) information into the memory elements **222**.

Programming information into the memory elements **222** can include causing the memory elements **222** to have specific resistance states. Thus, reading information from a memory cell **200** can include, for example, determining a resistance state of the memory element **222** in response to a specific voltage being applied to its access component **211**. The act of determining resistance may involve sensing a current (or the absence of current) flowing through the memory cell **200** (e.g., by sensing a current of a data line electrically coupled to the memory cell). Based on a measured value of the current (including, in some examples, whether a current is detected at all), a corresponding value of the information stored in the memory can be determined. The value of information stored in a memory cell **200** can be determined in still other ways, such as by sensing a voltage of a data line electrically coupled to the memory cell.

Various ones or all of the memory cells **100**, **200** of FIG. 1 and FIG. 2 can include a memory cell having a structure similar or identical to one or more of the memory cells described below.

With reference now to FIG. 3, a block diagram plan view of a memory device **301** is shown. The memory device **301** is shown to include a peripheral circuits region **303** and a



memory array region **305**. The peripheral circuits region **303** may include support circuits for the memory array region **305** including row decoders, column decoders, sense amplifiers, select circuits, bias circuits, and so on. Each of these support circuits may be similar to or identical to the circuits described above with reference to FIG. 1. The memory array region **305** may comprise various types of volatile or non-volatile memory cells including flash memory, conductive-bridging random access memory (CBRAM), resistive RAM (RRAM), phase change memory (PCM), static RAM (SRAM), dynamic RAM (DRAM), or various other types and combinations of types of memory devices.

In a specific embodiment, the peripheral circuits region **303** may have a first dimension,  $D_1$ , of approximately 10 mm and a second dimension,  $D_2$ , of approximately 5 mm. The memory array region **305** may have a first dimension,  $D_3$ , of approximately 10 mm and a second dimension,  $D_4$ , of approximately 10 mm. The peripheral circuits region is located adjacent to a peripheral (e.g., outside) edge of a substrate of the memory device **301** and adjacent (e.g., laterally adjacent) to the memory array region **305**. The peripheral circuits region **303** and the memory array region **305** are separated by a distance,  $D_5$ , of approximately 1 micrometer (micron). Dimensions larger or smaller than those described may be employed. Thus, the specific dimensions given herein are provided merely to assist the person of ordinary skill in the art in more fully understanding the subject matter.

FIG. 4A through 4D show elevational views during various operations performed in the formation of a memory device **400**. Referring specifically to FIG. 4A, an elevational view of the memory device **400** is shown to include a substrate **401** with a memory array **420** (e.g., a memory structure) formed proximate to (e.g., on) a surface **411** of the substrate **401**. The memory array **420** comprises a stack **422** formed of alternating levels of semiconductor materials **405** and dielectric materials **403** surrounding a pillar **407**. The pillar **407** may electrically couple the levels of semiconductor materials **405** together.

As shown in FIG. 4A, each of the levels of the semiconductor material **405** is separated from a respective adjacent one of the levels of the semiconductor material **405** by at least a respective one of the levels of the dielectric material **403**. Although only four levels of each of the levels of semiconductor material **405** and each of the levels of the dielectric material **403** are shown, a skilled artisan will recognize that any number of levels may be formed on the surface **411** of the substrate **401**.

The substrate **401** may comprise, for example, any of various substrate semiconducting types used in the semiconductor and allied industries. Substrate types may therefore include silicon wafers, compound semiconductor wafers, thin film head assemblies, polyethylene-terephthalate (PET) films deposited or otherwise formed with a semiconductor layer (followed by an annealing activity, such as excimer laser annealing (ELA) in some embodiments), or numerous other types of substrates known independently in the art. In addition to silicon, various other elemental semiconductor materials may also be considered. Further, the substrate **401** may comprise a region of a semiconductor material formed over a non-semiconductor material (e.g., quartz, ceramic, etc.). For ease of understanding the fabrication activities that follow, the substrate **401** may be considered to be a silicon wafer. Upon reading and understanding the disclosure provided herein, a person of ordinary skill in the art will understand how to modify the fabrication activities and operations disclosed to account for other types of materials and electronic devices.

The dielectric materials **403** may comprise one or more dielectric materials known in the art. For example, the various dielectric materials may comprise silicon dioxide ( $\text{SiO}_2$ ), silicon nitride ( $\text{Si}_3\text{N}_4$ ), aluminum oxide ( $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ), tantalum pentoxide ( $\text{Ta}_2\text{O}_5$ ), hafnium oxide ( $\text{HfO}_2$ ), or a variety of other organic or inorganic dielectric materials, each of which may be used as an alternative to or in conjunction with others of the materials described. Also, various other combinations of materials may also be substituted or included.

The semiconductor material **405** may comprise any of a number of types of single-crystal or amorphous semiconductor materials. For example, the semiconductor material **405** may be an epitaxial deposition of silicon, other elemental semiconductor, or compound semiconductor. In other examples, the semiconductor material **405** may be a polysilicon material (e.g., a conductively doped polysilicon material) formed by, for example, thermal decomposition or pyrolysis of silane such as a low-pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD) process. Other techniques known independently in the art, such as DC sputtering, followed by a post-anneal activity in some embodiments, may also be utilized.

In a specific example, each of the levels of semiconductor material **405** and each of the levels of the dielectric material **403** are shown as having a dimension,  $D_7$  and  $D_6$  respectively, as approximately 50 nm each. However, dimensions larger or smaller than these may be employed.

The pillar **407** may comprise a (e.g., conductively doped) semiconductor material. The semiconductor material may comprise any one or more of the elemental or compound semiconductor materials discussed above. In an example, the pillar **407** comprises channel material (e.g., any one or more of the semiconductor materials disclosed herein). Therefore, in various embodiments, a string of memory cells (e.g., a NAND string of memory cells) may be formed along the semiconductor material **405** levels.

In a specific example, a dimension,  $D_8$ , of the pillar **407** is approximately 50 nm. An overall height, indicated by dimension  $D_9$ , will depend at least partially on the number and thicknesses of alternating levels of the semiconductor materials **405** and the dielectric materials **403**. Also, as shown in FIG. 4A, an upper surface **413** of the pillar **407** extends above an upper surface **409** of the uppermost level of the levels of the semiconductor material **405**. The upper surfaces **409**, **413** may therefore be considered distal to the surface **411** of the substrate **401**. The difference in height between the upper surface **413** of the pillar **407** and the upper surface **409** of the semiconductor material **405** may vary. In some embodiments, the upper surface **413** of the pillar **407** may be substantially coplanar with or below the upper surface **409** of the semiconductor material **405**. A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that terms such as “upper” and “above” are being used as relative terminology with respect to a chosen plane, and are not being used in a specific fashion with respect to a fixed plane.

With reference now to FIG. 4B, an elevated portion **421** (e.g., a peripheral structure) is formed on the surface **411** of the substrate **401** laterally adjacent to (e.g., near) a peripheral edge of the memory array **420**. In various embodiments, the elevated portion **421** is formed such that an uppermost surface **423** of the elevated portion **421** is substantially coplanar with (e.g., above, below, or similar in height to) the upper surface **409** of the stack **422** of semiconductor materials **405**. In various embodiments, the elevated portion **421** is formed such that an uppermost surface **423** of the elevated portion **421** is substantially coplanar with (e.g., above, below, or similar in height to) the upper surface **413** of the pillar **407**. As used herein, “substantially co-planar” may include, for



example, within  $\pm 50\%$  of an overall height of the pillar **407**, indicated by dimension  $D_9$ . In other examples, "substantially co-planar" may include, for example, within  $\pm 10\%$  or less of an overall height of the pillar **407**, indicated by dimension  $D_9$ .

In various embodiments, the elevated portion **421** may comprise epitaxial silicon formed on the surface **411** of the substrate **401**. In various embodiments, the elevated portion **421** may be a semiconductor material (e.g., single crystal or amorphous silicon, germanium, other elemental semiconductor material, compound semiconductor material, etc.) formed (e.g., through various deposition techniques) on the surface **411** of the substrate **401**. In various embodiments, the elevated portion **421** may be a dielectric material formed on the surface **411** of the substrate **401** and having exposed portions covered with one or more of the various semiconductor materials described herein to electrically couple the elevated portion **421** to the substrate **401**.

FIG. 4C shows one or more devices **430** formed adjacent to (e.g., on and/or in) the uppermost surface **423** of the elevated portion **421**. The one or more devices **430** may operably interface with (e.g., be electrically or optically coupled to) the memory array **420**.

In various embodiments, the devices **430** may comprise active components (e.g., transistors, registers, etc.). For example, a first structure **431A** and a third structure **431C** may be wells of a transistor. A second structure **431B** may be a transistor gate. In various embodiments, the first structure **431A**, the second structure **431B**, and the third structure **431C** may comprise passive components. For example, the first structure **431A** and the third structure **431C** may be inductors formed into the elevated portion **421**. The second structure **431B** may be a portion of a capacitor formed above the elevated portion **421**. In various embodiments, the first structure **431A**, the second structure **431B**, and the third structure **431C** may comprise a mix of active and passive components.

As will be explained in more detail with reference to FIG. 4D, below, the elevated portion **421** allows a reduction in the height of contacts (e.g., ohmic or optical contacts) formed between the devices **430** and an interconnect (e.g., a metal line or an optical waveguide) that is formed later in the fabrication process.

FIG. 4D shows a number of memory array contacts **453** and a number of device contacts **451**. In some embodiments, the contacts **451**, **453** may be formed substantially concurrently. In some embodiments, either the memory array contacts **453** or the device contacts may be formed first. Interconnects **455** may be used to interconnect various portions of the devices **430**, the memory array **420**, and other devices external to the memory device **400**. As will be apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art, only a portion of the contacts are shown to preserve clarity of the drawings.

With the devices **430** being formed on and/or in the elevated portion **421**, it can be seen that the overall height of the device contacts **451** is reduced when compared with forming the devices **430** on the surface **411** of the substrate **401**. That is, a conventional process in which the devices are formed on the surface of the substrate would require the device contacts to be a greater height in order to reach the same level (e.g., to couple to the interconnects) as the memory array contacts. The greater height increases the resistance of the contacts, and may have a detrimental effect on other electrical factors (e.g., increased parasitic capacitance and inductance) of the device contacts, for example.

Further, since the device contacts **451** have a reduced height compared with other contact formation processes, vias prepared to form the contacts also have a reduced height.

Consequently, the tolerance with which the vias are placed may be relaxed due the reduced height. With a shorter overall height of the vias, and the subsequently formed device contacts **451**, the precision and accuracy of placement of each of the vias may be less critical. Taller (e.g., higher) ones of the memory array contacts **453** can be located on edges of levels of the semiconductor materials **405** that are closer to the surface **411** of the substrate **401**. However, since a greater area is available in which the memory array contacts **453** may be coupled to the semiconductor materials **405**, a relaxed design rule (e.g., a greater tolerance for placement of the vias and the subsequently formed contacts) is possible. Thus, using various embodiments described herein, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that desirable electrical properties of the device contacts **451** may be increased (e.g., improved conductivity due to reduced resistance) at the same time the tolerance of contact placement during device formation may be relaxed.

Moreover, the various embodiments described allow for enhanced scalability of three-dimensional memory devices. For example, as an increasing number of levels are added to a memory device, the device contacts **451** may have a consistent parasitic resistance, capacitance, and inductance since the elevated portion **421** can be scaled to match the height of the memory array **420** (FIG. 4A). As more levels are added to the memory array **420**, the height of the elevated portion **421** can be increased. Thus, the device contacts **451** remain fairly consistent in height regardless of the number of levels in the memory array **420**.

Referring now to FIG. 5A through FIG. 5C, elevational views during various operations performed in the formation of a memory device **500** are shown. Specifically with reference now to FIG. 5A, a cavity **504**, having a lower surface **521**, is formed in a substrate **501**. The substrate **501** may be similar to the substrate **401** described above with reference to FIG. 4A through FIG. 4D, above. For example, the substrate **501** may, for example, comprise elemental or compound semiconductors, dielectric materials covered with a semiconductor material, or a number of combinations of materials described herein.

In one embodiment, the cavity **504** is a trench. In other embodiments, the opening can be comprised of geometries other than a trench. However, for ease in understanding fabrication of the inventive subject matter discussed herein, the cavity **504** can be considered to be an opening (e.g., an aperture) formed within the substrate **501**.

The cavity **504** may be formed with dimensions suitable for a later-formed memory array. For example, in a specific embodiment, the cavity **504** has a first dimension,  $D_{11}$ , of approximately 10 mm as measured along a surface **502** of the substrate **501**. However, this dimension may vary depending upon dimensions  $D_3$  and  $D_4$  of the memory array region **305** of FIG. 3.

The second dimension,  $D_{10}$ , is dependent, at least partially, on the thicknesses and number of levels of the later-formed memory array that are to be formed substantially within (e.g., in some embodiments, entirely within) the cavity **504**. For example, assuming 16 alternating levels of the semiconductor materials **405** and the dielectric materials **403**, with each layer having dimensions  $D_7$  and  $D_6$  of 50 nm each as described with reference to FIG. 4A, the second dimension  $D_{10}$  is approximately 1.6 microns. The second dimension,  $D_{10}$ , of the cavity **504** may be selected so that an upper surface of a later-formed memory array is substantially coplanar with (e.g., above, below, or similar in height to) the surface **502** of the substrate **501**. In various embodiments, the cavity **504** may be formed in the substrate **501** to a depth (e.g., the second dimension,



D<sub>10</sub>) that is substantially equivalent to the height of a 3D memory array comprising multiple levels of memory cells as described above, and formed substantially within the cavity 504. However, the cavity 504 may be formed to any dimensions and shapes as discussed, by way of example, below.

For example, in a specific embodiment, the cavity 504 may be formed by an anisotropic dry etch process (e.g., reactive-ion etch (RIE), plasma etch, etc.). In other embodiments, the cavity 504 may be formed by various types of chemical anisotropic etchants (e.g., such as potassium hydroxide (KOH), tetramethyl ammonium hydroxide (TMAH), etc.), mechanical etching techniques, other types of ion milling, laser ablation techniques, etc. In the case of a chemical etchant, various lattice planes as found in, for example, single crystal materials, can assist in vertical sidewall formation. However, in other embodiments, vertical sidewall formation is not necessary and a sidewall slope to the cavity 504 may be present in certain applications. Therefore, although primarily anisotropic etchants and milling techniques have been discussed, isotropic etchants may also be employed. For example, a hydrofluoric/nitric/acetic (HNA) acid chemical etchant may be used. Related industries such as micro-electrical mechanical systems (MEMS) may independently supply techniques for still further means to form the cavity 504.

In FIG. 5B, a memory array 520 is formed on a lower surface 521 and at least partially within the cavity 504 of the substrate 501. In some embodiments, the memory array 520 may be formed completely within the cavity 504. In some embodiments, the memory array 520 may be formed primarily, but not entirely, within (e.g., substantially within) the cavity 504. The memory array 520 may be similar to or identical to the memory array 420 (FIG. 4A) and comprises alternating levels of semiconductor materials 505 and dielectric materials 503 with a pillar 507. As shown in FIG. 5B, each of the levels of the semiconductor material 505 is separated from a respective adjacent one of the levels of the semiconductor material 505 by at least a respective one of the levels of the dielectric material 503. Although only four levels of each of the levels of the semiconductor material 505 and each of the levels of the dielectric material 503 are shown, a skilled artisan will recognize that any number of levels may be formed in the memory array 520. Each of the levels of the semiconductor material 505 and of the dielectric material 503 may be formed from materials similar to the semiconductor material 405 and the dielectric material 503 described above with reference to FIG. 4A.

With continuing reference to FIG. 5B, one or more devices 530 are formed on and/or in the surface 502 of the substrate 501. The one or more devices 530 may operably interface with the memory array 520. In an example, a channel of the one or more devices may have a distance, H<sub>1C</sub>, below the surface 502 of greater than 100 nm. In an example, a bottom portion (e.g., on the lower surface 521) of the memory array 520 may have a distance, H<sub>1A</sub>, below the surface 502 of greater than 1 μm. In an example, a top portion of the pillar 507 may be at a distance H<sub>2</sub>, above the surface 502 of less than 100 nm. In an example, a top portion of the pillar 507 may be at a distance H<sub>2</sub>, above the surface 502 of less than 1 μm. Each of these measurements is provided simply as examples. Other distances, greater or smaller than these, may be used as well.

In various embodiments, and as discussed above with reference to FIG. 4C, the one or more devices 530 may comprise active components (e.g., transistors, registers, etc.). For example, a first structure 531A and a third structure 531C may be wells of a transistor. A second structure 531B may be a transistor gate. In various embodiments, the first structure 531A, the second structure 531B, and the third structure 531C

may be passive components. For example, the first structure 531A and the third structure 531C may be inductors formed into or on the surface 502 of the substrate 501. The second structure 531B may be a portion of a capacitor formed above the substrate 501. In various embodiments, the first structure 531A, the second structure 531B, and the third structure 531C may comprise a mix of active and passive components.

As described above with reference to FIG. 4D, above, the cavity 504 formed into the substrate 501 allows a reduction in the height of contacts formed between the one or more devices 530 and an interconnect that is formed later in the fabrication process.

FIG. 5C shows a number of memory array contacts 553 and a number of device contacts 551. In various embodiments, the contacts 551, 553 may be formed substantially concurrently. In some embodiments, either the memory array contacts 553 or the device contacts may be formed first. Interconnects 555 may be used to interconnect various portions of the one or more device 530, the memory array 520, and other devices external to the memory device 500. As will be apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art, only a portion of the contacts are shown to preserve clarity of the drawings.

Since the one or more devices 530 are formed on and/or in the surface 502 of the substrate 501, with the memory arrays 520 formed at least partially in the cavity 504 (and therefore most or all of the levels are substantially below the surface 502 of the substrate 501), the overall height of the device contacts 551 is reduced when compared with forming the memory array 520 on the surface 502 of the substrate 501. Thus, similar to the description of the device contacts 451 given with reference to FIG. 4D, above, the reduced height may reduce the resistance of the device contacts 551 as well as potentially reducing any detrimental effects on other electrical factors (e.g., parasitic capacitance and inductance) of the device contacts as well.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a system 600 with a memory device that may include one or more of the various embodiments described herein. The system 600 is shown to include a controller 603, an input/output (I/O) device 611 (e.g., a keypad, a touchscreen, or a display), a memory device 609, a wireless interface 607, a static random access memory (SRAM) device 601, and a shift register 615, each coupled to each other via a bus 613. A battery 605 may supply power to the system 600 in one embodiment. The memory device 609 may include a NAND memory, a flash memory, a NOR memory, a combination of these, or the like. The memory device 609 may include one or more of the novel devices and structures described herein.

The controller 603 may include, for example, one or more microprocessors, digital signal processors, micro-controllers, or the like. The memory device 609 may be used to store information transmitted to or by the system 600. The memory device 609 may optionally also be used to store information in the form of instructions that are executed by the controller 603 during operation of the system 600 and may be used to store information in the form of user data either generated, collected, or received by the system 600 (such as image data). The instructions may be stored as digital information and the user data, as disclosed herein, may be stored in one section of the memory as digital information and in another section as analog information. As another example, a given section at one time may be labeled to store digital information and then later may be reallocated and reconfigured to store analog information. The controller 603 may include one or more of the novel devices and structures described herein.

The I/O device 611 may be used to generate information. The system 600 may use the wireless interface 607 to transmit



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and receive information to and from a wireless communication network with a radio frequency (RF) signal. Examples of the wireless interface 607 may include an antenna, or a wireless transceiver, such as a dipole antenna. However, the scope of the inventive subject matter is not limited in this respect. Also, the I/O device 611 may deliver a signal reflecting what is stored as either a digital output (if digital information was stored), or as an analog output (if analog information was stored). While an example in a wireless application is provided above, embodiments of the inventive subject matter disclosed herein may also be used in non-wireless applications as well. The I/O device 611 may include one or more of the novel devices and structures described herein.

The various illustrations of the procedures and apparatuses are intended to provide a general understanding of the structure of various embodiments and are not intended to provide a complete description of all the elements and features of the apparatuses and methods that might make use of the structures, features, and materials described herein. Based upon a reading and understanding of the disclosed subject matter provided herein, a person of ordinary skill in the art can readily envision other combinations and permutations of the various embodiments. The additional combinations and permutations are all within a scope of the present invention.

The Abstract of the Disclosure is provided to comply with 37 C.F.R. §1.72(b), requiring an abstract allowing the reader to quickly ascertain the nature of the technical disclosure. The abstract is submitted with the understanding that it will not be used to interpret or limit the claims. In addition, in the foregoing Detailed Description, it may be seen that various features are grouped together in a single embodiment for the purpose of streamlining the disclosure. This method of disclosure is not to be interpreted as limiting the claims. Thus, the following claims are hereby incorporated into the Detailed Description, with each claim standing on its own as a separate embodiment.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of forming a memory apparatus, the method comprising:

forming a memory array having a first surface proximate to a surface of a substrate and a second surface distal to the surface of the substrate, the memory array including:  
forming a number of levels of semiconductor material and a number of levels of dielectric material, each of the levels of semiconductor material being separated from a respective adjacent one of the levels of semiconductor material by at least a respective one of the levels of dielectric material;

forming peripheral circuitry for the memory array, including:

forming an elevated portion adjacent to a peripheral edge of the substrate and adjacent to the memory array;

forming devices for interfacing with the memory array adjacent to a surface of the elevated portion that is more distal to the surface of the substrate than the first surface of the memory array; and

forming an upper surface of the peripheral circuitry to be substantially coplanar with an upper surface of the memory array to reduce an overall height of peripheral circuitry contacts to couple the peripheral circuitry contacts from the peripheral circuitry to respective ones of a plurality of interconnects; and

forming the plurality of interconnects between the memory array and the peripheral circuitry.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising forming the elevated portion from silicon.

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3. The method of claim 1, wherein forming the elevated portion comprises:

forming a dielectric material; and

forming a semiconductor material over at least an exposed uppermost portion of the dielectric material that is distal to the surface of the substrate.

4. A method of manufacturing a semiconductor apparatus, the method comprising:

forming a memory structure including semiconductor material levels and dielectric material levels alternately stacked proximate to a surface of a substrate in a memory array region;

forming a peripheral structure including peripheral circuits in a peripheral circuit region adjacent to the memory array region, the peripheral structure being elevated from the surface of the substrate, the forming of the peripheral structure including forming an upper surface of the peripheral structure to be substantially coplanar with an upper surface of the memory structure to reduce an overall height of peripheral circuitry contacts to couple the peripheral circuitry contacts from the peripheral structure to respective ones of a plurality of interconnects; and

forming the plurality of interconnects between the memory structure and the peripheral structure.

5. An apparatus, comprising:

a memory array having a number of levels of memory cells with each level being arranged substantially parallel to a surface of a substrate, the memory array having a first surface proximate to the surface of the substrate and a second surface distal from the surface of the substrate; an elevated portion formed adjacent to a peripheral edge of the memory array, a surface of the elevated portion being substantially coplanar with the second surface of the memory array; and

peripheral circuitry formed adjacent to the surface of the elevated portion and configured to interface with the memory array, an upper surface of the peripheral circuitry being substantially coplanar with an upper surface of the memory array to reduce an overall height of peripheral circuitry contacts to couple the peripheral circuitry contacts from the peripheral circuitry to respective ones of a plurality of interconnects, the plurality of interconnects being formed between the memory array and the peripheral circuitry.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the elevated portion is electrically coupled to the substrate.

7. An apparatus, comprising:

a memory array proximate to a surface of a substrate and having alternating levels of semiconductor materials and dielectric material with strings of memory cells formed along the alternating levels;

an elevated portion formed adjacent to the memory array, an upper surface of the elevated portion being distal from the surface of the substrate and substantially coplanar with an upper surface of the memory array; and

peripheral circuitry formed adjacent to the upper surface of the elevated portion, an upper surface of the peripheral circuitry being substantially coplanar with an upper surface of the memory array to reduce an overall height of peripheral circuitry contacts to couple the peripheral circuitry contacts from the peripheral circuitry to respective ones of a plurality of interconnects, the plurality of interconnects being formed between the memory array and the peripheral circuitry.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the elevated portion comprises epitaxial silicon.



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9. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the elevated portion comprises a dielectric material with a semiconductor material formed over at least an uppermost surface of the dielectric material.

10. An apparatus, comprising:

a memory array having a lower portion formed adjacent to a surface of a substrate, the memory array having alternating levels of semiconductor materials and dielectric materials extending away from the surface of the substrate, the alternating levels having strings of memory cells formed thereon;

an elevated portion formed on the surface of the substrate and located laterally adjacent to the memory array, the elevated portion having support circuitry located adjacent to an uppermost surface of the elevated portion, the support circuitry to supplement operations of the memory array; and

a pillar comprising a semiconductor material, the pillar extending from a lower portion of the memory array to an uppermost portion of the memory array that is distal from the surface of the substrate.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the uppermost surface of the elevated portion is substantially coplanar with an uppermost portion of the memory array.

12. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the substrate comprises at least one material selected from materials consisting of elemental semiconductor wafers, compound semiconductor wafers, thin film head assemblies, and polyethylene-terephthalate (PET) films having a semiconductor layer formed thereon.

13. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the substrate comprises a region of a semiconductor material formed over a non-semiconductor material.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the non-semiconductor material comprises at least one material selected from materials consisting of quartz and ceramic.

15. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the support circuitry comprises at least one of active devices to control

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operations of the memory array and passive components related to operations of the memory array.

16. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the elevated portion is substantially coplanar with an uppermost portion of the memory array to within 50% of an overall height of the pillar.

17. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the elevated portion is substantially coplanar with an uppermost portion of the memory array to within 10% of an overall height of the pillar.

18. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein at least the uppermost surface of the elevated portion comprises at least one material selected from materials consisting of epitaxial silicon, a single-crystal semiconductor element, an amorphous semiconductor element, single-crystal semiconductor compound, and an amorphous semiconductor compound.

19. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein the at least one material is formed over a dielectric material comprising the bulk of the elevated portion.

20. An apparatus, comprising:

a memory array having a lower portion formed adjacent to a surface of a substrate, the memory array having alternating levels of semiconductor materials and dielectric materials extending away from the surface of the substrate, the alternating levels having strings of memory cells formed thereon; and

an elevated portion formed on the surface of the substrate and located laterally adjacent to the memory array, the elevated portion having support circuitry located adjacent to an uppermost surface of the elevated portion, the support circuitry to supplement operations of the memory array, at least the uppermost surface of the elevated portion comprising at least one material selected from materials consisting of epitaxial silicon, a single-crystal semiconductor element, an amorphous semiconductor element, single-crystal semiconductor compound, and an amorphous semiconductor compound.

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